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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000679

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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: ACTION REQUEST FOR PRESS STATEMENT
REAFFIRMING USG POLICY

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF DOVIE HOLLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

11. (C) Summary: During the Human Rights Committee meeting on September 22 at the UN, a statement was made concerning USG policy in Madagascar that has generated some confusion in country. Additionally, the African Union plans to host the third International Contact Group meeting on Madagascar here October 6. In an effort to clarify the USG position and support the upcoming meeting, Post requests that the Department issue a press statement during the week of September 28. Please see para 6 for suggested text. End summary.

12. (C) During the Human Rights Committee meeting on September 22, the USG representative stated that "we continue to insist that the leaders of the unconstitutional governments in Guinea and Madagascar step down, follow through on their commitments to hold free and fair elections, and ensure civil liberties are protected during transition periods." This statement has not gone unremarked here, causing some confusion as it varies from previous statements issued by the Department and Post. It has also generated new, specious press attacks against the USG and Ambassador Marquardt personally for interfering in Malagasy internal affairs. Previously we have called upon the leaders of Madagascar to undertake a democratic, consensual process to restore constitutional governance, culminating in free, fair and peaceful elections. We have never called publicly or explicitly for anyone to resign, preferring instead to support the AU-led process which may or may not lead to leadership changes in the transition.

13. (C) Background: Madagascar's four main political factions, led by de facto transition president Rajoelina, ousted President Ravalomanana, former President Ratsiraka, and former President Zafy, have been involved in a negotiation process led by the African Union, in conjunction with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the UN, and the International Francophonie Organization (OIF) since April, when an International Contact Group (ICG) was established to monitor the situation. In August, two rounds of talks among the four leaders were held in Mozambique. The first session resulted in the signing of a transition charter August 9. The second round stalled when the four parties could not reach consensus on who would hold the top three positions of the transition government. The AU plans to host the third ICG meeting in Madagascar October 6 to pressure the de facto authorities to compromise. A likely solution, if one can be reached, would entail the current transition leader Rajoelina retaining his position, but replacing his prime minister with a consensus candidate.

¶4. (C) The USG has been supportive of the ICG process throughout, indicating publicly that the consensus outcome was for the Malagasy leaders to decide. The call for those leaders to step down, as stated at the Human Rights Committee, is being interpreted here as a change in USG position, ending our previous position of neutrality and supporting some factions over others. Although having a beneficiary or leader of the coup retaining his position as transition president may not be the ideal outcome, it may be the best feasible solution to the simmering political crisis.

If the Malagasy themselves agree to that solution, the USG view has been -- and, in post's view, should remain -- that the USG joins the the AU-led international community in supporting it.

¶5. (C) Action Request: Post requests that the Department issue a press statement next week to restate, and correct any misperceptions regarding, USG policy towards Madagascar, specifically our support for the formation of a consensual, inclusive transition government. This statement would be most effective issued next week in the run-up to the International Contact Group (ICG) meeting on October 6. A statement released at post rather than in Washington will not fully have the desired effect given renewed press allegations that post and ambassador are operating on their own.

¶6. (U) Begin Draft Statement. The USG continues to support the negotiation process led by the AU, SADC, UN, and the OIF to resolve the political crisis in Madagascar. We welcome the efforts of the AU to convene the third International Contact Group meeting in Antananarivo on October 6, in which

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the USG will participate at a high level. We call again on Madagascar's political leaders to respect the terms of the agreements reached in Maputo in August to form a consensual, inclusive transition government without further delay, with the credibility to organize free, fair, and peaceful elections within the 15-month timetable outlined in the transition charter. We urge Madagascar's leaders to take concrete steps immediately to restore the rule of law, implement a consensual transition, respect human rights, and limit the corruption that is damaging both the business climate and the environment. We remain impartial and will not support any unilateral solutions by any party, as such moves will not produce a lasting solution based on credible, fair elections. End Draft Statement.

MARQUARDT